

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 1078, TO ESTABLISH THE
HARRIET TUBMAN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK IN AUBURN, NEW
YORK, AND THE HARRIET TUBMAN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK IN CAROLINE, DORCHESTER AND
TALBOT COUNTIES, MARYLAND AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

MARCH 24, 2009

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 1078, a bill to establish the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn, New York, and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot Counties in Maryland.

The Department supports enactment of H.R. 1078.

Harriet Tubman is truly an iconic American. Born circa 1822 as an enslaved person in Dorchester County, Maryland, she courageously escaped her bondage in 1849, returned on many occasions to Dorchester and Caroline Counties to free others including members of her family and remains known, popularly and appropriately, as “The Moses of her People.” She was a leading “conductor” along the Underground Railroad guiding the enslaved to freedom at great risk to her own life. Her accomplishments were admired and extolled by her contemporaries including the abolitionist leader and former slave Frederick Douglass. In 1868 Douglass wrote to Tubman:

“Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. I have wrought in the day—you in the night...The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism.”

Harriet Tubman served honorably during this nation’s Civil War as a cook, nurse, scout and spy for Union forces in Virginia, South Carolina and Florida, always at personal risk and always advancing the quest for freedom by providing assistance to other enslaved people. In June 1863 she guided Union troops in South Carolina for an assault along the Combahee River resulting in the emancipation of hundreds of the enslaved.

At the invitation of then U.S. Senator and later Secretary of State William H. Seward, Harriet Tubman purchased land from him in Auburn, New York where she lived and cared for members of her family and other former slaves seeking safe haven in the North. In later life, she became active in progressive causes including efforts for women’s suffrage. Working closely with activists such as Susan B. Anthony and Emily Howland, she traveled from Auburn to cities in the East advocating voting rights for women. Harriet Tubman gave the keynote speech at the first meeting of the National Federation of Afro-American Women upon its founding in 1896.

Harriet Tubman was an intensely spiritual person and active in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. In 1903 she donated land to the Church in Auburn for the

establishment of a home “for aged and indigent colored people.” She died on March 10, 1913 at this home for the aged and was buried with full military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn. Booker T. Washington, also born into slavery, journeyed from Alabama a year later to speak at the installation of a commemorative plaque for her at Auburn City Hall.

Harriet Tubman is an American figure of lore and legend. Today, she is an enduring inspiration to those who cherish individual freedom and strive for human rights throughout the world.

On January 12, 2009, the Department transmitted the Harriet Tubman Special Resource Study to Congress. The study, authorized by Public Law 106-516, the Harriet Tubman Special Resource Study Act, concluded that the resources associated with Harriet Tubman in Auburn, New York and Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot Counties, Maryland met the national significance, suitability, feasibility and need for National Park Service management criteria for potential units of the National Park System. After an intensive and lengthy public involvement process, the study found that there is extensive public support, including support by affected private property owners within the boundaries proposed by H.R. 1078 in New York and Maryland, for the establishment of the two units. Locally elected officials in both states have also expressed their support.

H.R. 1078 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to establish a unit of the National Park System, the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn, New York, upon

the execution of an easement with the A.M.E. Zion Church, the owners of the property. The park would be comprised of the Harriet Tubman Home, the Home for the Aged, the Thompson Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, which is no longer used for religious services, and its parsonage. The Secretary would be authorized to enter into cooperative agreements and provide technical and matching financial assistance to the A.M.E. Zion Church and others for historic preservation, rehabilitation, research, maintenance and interpretation of the park and related Harriet Tubman resources in Auburn, New York. The Secretary would be further authorized to provide uniformed National Park Service staff to operate the park in partnership with the Church and to conduct interpretation and tours.

In Maryland, the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park would be established and comprised of nationally significant historic landscapes associated with Harriet Tubman in Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot Counties. This agricultural, forest and riverine mosaic largely retains historic integrity from the time that Tubman was born enslaved, worked in the fields and forests, emancipated herself, and helped others there to escape to freedom.

The Secretary of the Interior would be authorized to provide matching grants to the state of Maryland, local governments and nonprofit organizations for the purchase of lands and easements within the boundary of the park and matching grants to the state of Maryland for the construction of a visitor services facility to be jointly operated by the state and uniformed staff of the National Park Service. The Secretary would be further authorized

to enter into cooperative agreements with various organizations and property owners, and provide grants for the restoration, rehabilitation, public use, and interpretation of sites and resources related to Harriet Tubman, as well as research including archeology. Because a number of closely related Harriet Tubman resources exist on lands adjacent to the proposed park managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, or on lands scheduled for future refuge acquisition, the bill provides for an interagency agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service to promote compatible stewardship and interpretation of these resources.

The cost estimates for the annual operations and maintenance for each unit would be approximately \$500,000 to \$650,000. The cost estimates for the federal share of capital improvements are approximately \$7.5 million at the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn, New York. The federal share of the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad visitor center and grants for land protection at the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Maryland are estimated at up to \$11 million. The cost estimates for the completion of the general management plan for each unit would be approximately \$600,000 to \$700,000. All funds are subject to NPS priorities and the availability of appropriations.

The Department notes that there are a few inconsistencies between the provisions of H.R. 1078 and those of its companion measure in the Senate--S. 227. We would appreciate the opportunity to work with the committee to resolve these differences.

Mr. Chairman, it is not a usual occasion when the Department comes before the committee to testify on a bill to establish two units of the National Park System to honor an enslaved woman who rose from the most difficult and humble beginnings imaginable to indelibly influence the causes of human justice and equality in our society, and to have such a significant impact on our national story. We do so with full understanding of the life and contributions of Harriet Tubman and suggest that nearly 100 years after her death the time for this abundantly deserved honor has finally arrived.

That concludes my testimony Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions from you and members of the committee.